
How to Work with the Media to Promote Your Neighborhood Project

Yes we can!

Take advantage of tools to help recruit residents to participate in your neighborhood project or group.

A **How-to Guide** for neighborhood leaders working to make life better for people in Battle Creek



How to Work with the Media to Promote Your Neighborhood Project

Many neighborhood projects require a good deal of participants to be successful. And many projects can benefit from coverage in local newspapers, radio and television. Three free tools to gain media attention that will help your group recruit volunteers or get your project noticed are news releases, public service announcements and event announcements.

News Releases

A news release is a planned news story used to communicate information to the media about an event your group has planned or work your group has done. It is a tool to generate publicity—or free advertising—for your group. A news release allows you to send your message to a specific media outlet like a local newspaper. The newspaper may publish portions of your news release or have a reporter follow up with you and attend your event.

A clear message is important to getting your news release into the newspaper. While the format of the release can vary, there are key pieces of information that will also help get your message published.

- Place the date of release on the top of the page. The date of release tells the editor when the release should be published. If the time of the release does not matter, write “For Immediate Release.”
- Write a headline on the top of the page to grab the editor's attention.
- The body of the release should be written in the clear style of a news story with short paragraphs. It should have line spacing of 1.5 or 2 lines with wide side margins to make it easier to read. The who, what, when and where information should come in the first paragraphs, and should be followed by the how and why information. Spend some time on that first sentence to capture attention.
- Never write more than two pages. If you go to a second page, write “More” on the bottom of the first.
- Be sure to include a telephone number and a contact person so the media representative can follow up if they have questions.
- If photographs accompany your news release, include a caption telling who, what, where and when. Most publications accept electronic or printed photos. You should check with the editor for specifications.
- Because some newspapers in Battle Creek may use your news release as an actual article, have some of your group's members read the release for understanding, grammar and mistakes.

For Immediate Release

Contact: Cindy Thomas
Program Coordinator
269.441.2185

AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM PROVIDES “SAFE” PLACE FOR KIDS

BATTLE CREEK, Michigan – When Samantha Brown and her neighbors heard that two boys got into trouble after school because they were at home alone, they knew they had to do something. They decided that there needed to be a safe place for children to go after school. The program, called Successful Approaches to Further Education (SAFE), serves approximately 34 children in the Lakeland neighborhood. The program, located in the gym of First Presbyterian Church on the corner of Pier and Main, runs from 3:00–7:00 p.m. each weekday. The children who participate range in age from six to twelve years.

“We wanted the kids to be able to come somewhere after school where they could hang out, have fun and have someone watch out for them,” says Brown. “Starting the program was the best option so that the kids could get help with homework and not get into trouble.”

Two part-time staff members and 10 volunteers help keep the child/adult ratio low so that children can more easily get personal attention, including help with homework. The program hopes to expand to include teenagers as well, but it will need to secure more staff and more volunteers before that becomes a possibility.

If you are interested in volunteering at SAFE or enrolling your child into the program, contact Samantha Brown at (269) 555-2185.

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Where and When to Send the Release

- You should mail the release about a week before your event. Check with the newspapers to find out how far in advance they need the release. Address it to a particular person—the person in charge of community affairs or the editor, if it's a small paper. Make sure it gets to the right people. See the Local Resources section on the back of this guide for contact information.

- Follow up by calling the paper to find out whether coverage is likely.
- After your news release has been sent, read the papers to find out whether your efforts were successful. If you did receive coverage, send a thank-you note to the reporter who wrote the story.
- If you are sending out a news release that covers an event or other activity that has already taken place, it's important to develop and send it as soon as possible after the activity. Media organizations generally do not publish articles for events that are more than two weeks old. You may want to write portions of the release before the activity so that you can just make a few additions or changes before you send it off.

has a realistic chance of being heard. You should also keep in mind that PSAs are aired at the discretion of the station's management, and you have no control over when and how often your message will be played.

Send an announcement you would like to have read over the air to the station's Community Affairs Director or other appropriate contact. The announcement should briefly state the facts of your event—what it is, who it's for, why it's taking place, and when and where it's being held—and must include a contact name and phone number. Include a start and stop date for the announcement. Keep the announcement as short and as clear as possible, and be prepared to see it edited.

Follow up on your PSA with a phone call to see whether it was acceptable to the station. It is useful to speak directly to the Community Affairs Director. She or he generally has some influence over what topics are covered on the station's talk shows, and may be able to provide some access to friendly news people. You can ask when your PSA will be aired, but few stations will give you more than a general idea.

AccessVision community television is one media outlet where you do have some control over your PSA. PSAs can be aired through AccessVision's Community Voice program, its Community Bulletin Board, or through your own program which you can develop after attending training. Call 968-3633 for more information.

Public Service Announcements

Public Service Announcements (PSAs) are another way to get your message across. They are a free announcement of activities or events run by radio and television stations. They are an important source of free publicity for neighborhood groups and nonprofit organizations.

PSAs can gain public support for your group, but they cannot include political or controversial statements of any kind. For example, you can use a PSA to inform the public about your referral service for people who need emergency food; you cannot explain why you are opposed to a political candidate who wants to cut food stamp entitlements.

Where and When to Send the PSA

Call each television and radio station to learn each station's format, target audience and who should receive the PSA. You can start with the contact information listed in Local Resources on the back page. Select only those stations where your message and issue

Public Service Announcement

PLEASE AIR UNTIL JULY 11

Contact: Cindy Thomas
Program Coordinator
269.441.2185

S.A.F.E. after-school program helps parents and children: it's 3:00 p.m. Monday afternoon, you don't get off work until 5:00, but your child is getting home from school now.

There is a solution to your problem – S.A.F.E.! S.A.F.E. is an after-school program for children ages 5-12 in the Lincoln Heights (in the news release you used Lakeview) neighborhood. With capable staff and caring volunteers, your child can play, have fun, and get help with his or her homework. Your mind will be at ease knowing your child is safe.

For more information on how to enroll your child in the S.A.F.E. after-school program or to volunteer, contact Samantha Brown in the S.A.F.E. office at (269) 555-2185.

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Event Announcements

Most community newspapers, including *Shopper News* and the *Battle Creek Enquirer*, have event announcements. An event announcement is a brief who-what-when-where notice of any event of public interest. It can be used to publicize one-time events—such as workshops, lectures or fundraisers—or to remind the public of ongoing programs you are running. When you send an event announcement to a newspaper, be sure to:

- List a string of facts: event, date, place and contact with a phone number.
- Include the date when you want the list to appear.
- Generally, you should send the listing two weeks before you want it to appear, but check the deadline of the particular paper to be sure.

Local Resources

Public Service Announcements

Radio

WKFR, 103.3 FM

4154 Jennings Dr.
Kalamazoo MI 49048
344-2444
jodi.victor@cumulus.com

WNWN, 98.5 FM

25 Michigan Ave.
West Battle Creek MI 49017
968-1991 FAX
PSA: 968-1881
pjlacey@mwcradio.com

WBCK, 930 AM/WBXX

390 Golden Avenue
Battle Creek MI 49015
963-6397
chrissimmons@clearchannel.com

WFPM, 99.5 FM

Reverend Elmer Hess
cell phone: 274-2083

Television

WWMT, Channel 3

590 West Maple St.
Kalamazoo MI 49008
800-875-3333
nanckern@wwmt.com

WOOD, Channel 8

Melissa Dunbar, reporter for Battle Creek/Kalamazoo region, 616-771-9633
General community affairs:
caffairs@woodtv.com

AccessVision, Channels 11 and 12

67 West Michigan Ave., Suite 112
Battle Creek MI 49017
968-3633
greg@accessvision.tv

News Releases and Event Announcements

Battle Creek Enquirer

155 West VanBuren
Battle Creek MI 49017
800-333-4139
<http://www.battlecreekenquirer.com/customerservice/contactus.html>

Shopper News

1361 Columbia Ave.
East Battle Creek MI 49014
965-3955
shopper@choiceonemail.com

El Zocalo

77 E. Michigan Ave., Suite 206
Battle Creek MI 49017
800-660-3515 or 441-5600
elzocalonews@latinmail.com

New Opinion

77 E. Michigan Ave., Suite 202
Battle Creek MI 49017
441-3518
newopinion@terra.com

Scene Magazine

4642 Capital Ave. SW
Battle Creek MI 49015-9350
979-1410
gordon@scenepub.com

See the *How to Communicate About Your Neighborhood Group or Project* guide for more information.

Feel free to share this guide with friends and neighbors. Call 269-969-2228 for additional copies and for other guides on a variety of how-to topics.

Source: The Citizens Committee for New York City, Inc.

Yes we can! is a collaboration among Battle Creek residents and organizations working to help kids achieve in school and build a solid economic future for the people of our community. *Yes we can!* is funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

For general questions about *Yes we can!*, call 269-969-2228 or visit www.wkkf.org/yeswecan. To apply for a mini-grant to support your neighborhood or community project in Battle Creek, call the Battle Creek Community Foundation at 269-962-2181.

Yes we can!